

Attention to detail paid off for Lewis

When hardware merchant John Lewis built his house he made sure the brass shone like brass.

Time took the gleam off the house at 197 Charles St. in Belleville, but hard work has restored most of it to the original state of finesse.

According to the Hastings County Historical Society, Lewis opened his Front Street business in 1849 and had his house built around 1865. He expanded the company to include a spring factory and, in 1868, a steam saw mill.

The ventures must have been lucrative as the house was built with attention to detail and not to cost. Perhaps the attention is how the company received a warrant by Queen Victoria as supplier to government agencies.

In 1908 wholesale grocer Fred Wallbridge bought the house. He had married Lewis' daughter, Ella.

Today, Elmer and Louise McNamara own the building. They purchased it in 1981 from Walter and Marlene McHugh. For many years prior to that it was home to Dr. Earle MacDonald and his wife, Monica. Dr. MacDonald ran his medical practice from the house. Before the arrival of the MacDonalds, Milton and Adele Salz lived there.

The McNamaras have worked hard to restore the house. Louise has stripped paint from most of the tall Gothic arches surrounding the interior doors and windows. She has also removed paint from the wide baseboards in the rooms.

There are seven fireplaces in the house. Three on the main floor are marble while one in the basement and three in the bedrooms are wooden with metal grates. Protruding from one of the marble facades is a fancy carving of fruit. One room has a water heater with hinged metal doors and a space inside for drying one's footwear. The floor in the living room is hardwood with cherry inlay near the walls.

The kitchen was originally in the basement and a dumb waiter used by servants remains, although the McNamaras have removed it from the shaft. The former kitchen's ceiling is pressed tin.

Evidence of John Lewis's profession can be seen in the front door's huge metal latches

that are covered with designs. The door is 2½ inches thick and has decorative metal hardware on its exterior. Two circular carvings in the top half resemble portholes.

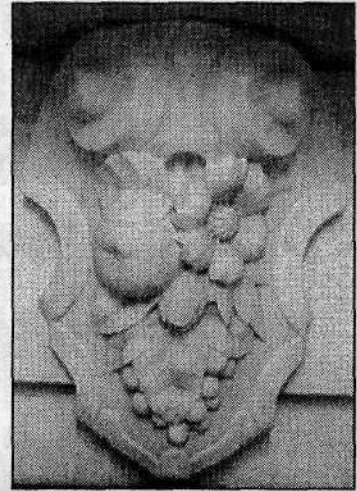
A staircase winds its way to the top of the tower, twisting back on itself three times. Louise believes the tower was once the servants' quarters.

Inside a closet on the second floor is a fancy cornice noticeable only on close inspection. Each bedroom has a transom window above the door.

Higher still is the house's main feature — the tower with mansard roof and cast-iron cresting. The cresting is one of very few remaining in Belleville although it was once common for larger homes.

The building has a stone foundation visible. There are likely three layers of brick sitting atop this because the walls are very thick.

Behind the house, facing Bridge Street, is what was once Lewis's carriage house. Today it houses Bridge Street



The carving in the McNamars' marble fireplace.

Variety.

The McNamaras added a kitchen at the rear of the house and expanded the basement but have otherwise made no structural changes, expending their energy returning it to its former appearance.

John Lewis would be pleased with the results.

197 Charles St.
Lewis Wallbridge
House